



Sacrifice

“You know what a sacrifice fly is, right?” I must confess, despite having a sermon in the Baseball Hall of Fame, I never did learn the nuances which make baseball, for some, a deeply spiritual and theological game. So, Drew Danielson, Coordinator of Youth Ministries, explained, “A sacrifice fly means that a batter chooses to hit a fly ball to advance another runner who is on the field. It’s a sacrifice because the batter doesn’t get to advance *themselves*. They sacrifice their opportunity to make a run and to advance their own batting score. It has a personal cost to the one who hits the fly ball, but it’s the thing the team needs.”

The theme of sacrifice is a richly complex one. We often look at the root of a word to understand its origin, and in our case, sacrifice is derived from the Latin root word *sacre* or, to make sacred. I wondered then, does hitting a fly ball really rise to the level of sacrifice? How is this effort sacred? (For true baseball fans, the answer is obvious.)

The sacred part of sacrifice means that it costs us something. In ancient Israel, the greater the sacrifice, the greater the hoped-for reward. By giving up something that you think you need, or something you cherish dearly, you would “get” something in return. Sacrifice in Hebrew Scriptures was a devotional practice which could be interpreted as a *quid pro quo* relationship with Yahweh | God: “I give up something — and I get something in return...” Later on, the prophet Amos challenges the centuries old practice of sacrifice. Channeling Yahweh | God, he writes, “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them...” Amos then proposes an alternative to the grain, flesh and blood sacrifices. He continues, “But

let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” What these scriptures suggest is that not all sacrifices are the equivalent. These scriptures ask their reader (and us) to dig deeper into the practice of sacrifice.

Sacrifice, in one definition from the dictionary, is about “giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.” In this understanding, it is an act motivated from within — an offering of something cherished made willingly because we’ve named something or someone else as claiming our hearts more fully. It gives up something to make way for the currents of a greater river, for the ever-flowing stream of life and justice.

Within this definition, we are encouraged to think of sacrifice not as a duty that changes our circumstances or others — but more importantly *us*. One of the indicators of something becoming sacred is that it enacts a kind of moral transformation in the way we regard one another. Am I willing to sacrifice the benefits of white privilege so that all may live with greater equity and justice? Am I willing to give up the ease of using plastic with the hope of reducing the trillions of microplastics found in our water? Am I willing to give up my cherished individualism for a greater, more wholistic and resounding “we?” When we start asking ourselves these questions, the idea of sacrifice is not a far away or long-ago discipline. It’s a practice of the here and now.

We can’t explore this theme of sacrifice without acknowledging that dominant and capitalist culture has *demand*ed the sacrifices of those from historically marginalized communities. Women, people of color, poor people, LGBTIQ+ communities have all received messages that their identities,

needs, ambitions and desires should be sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and conformity. In an article on this theme, authored by Rev. Karen Hering, she quotes Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Co-Executive Director Darrick Jackson. Reflecting on this reality, Jackson wrote, “As a person of color who grew up working-class, sacrifice has had different ramifications for me than for someone white and middle-class. Often I was starting from a place of sacrifice, so adding another ranged from a deeper burden to ‘what’s one more thing.’” Then he added, “Now, I’m beginning to understand sacrifice differently. It does not have to be grounded in pain and suffering. What we are asked to do is create space for others to thrive. In our interconnected world, the ‘I’ needs to be in balance with ‘We.’” What are we each asked to do to create space for others’ thriving — and for our own? What must we give up to support the earth’s thriving — and the wellbeing of all who depend on it?

As we consider this month’s theme of sacrifice, think of the many ways in which you sacrifice your own needs for the good of another. Then consider the ways in which you have been asked to let go of something that’s important to you. How do you feel about both of these opportunities? Jot those thoughts down in a journal and revisit them at month’s end.

*By Rev. Kathleen Rolenz on behalf of this month’s theme team:
Rev. Andrea Anastos, Drew Danielson,
Rev. KP Hong; and referencing Rev.
Karen Hering’s reflection on sacrifice.*

Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme please see this month’s Spiritual Practice Packet, available online at unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html.